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DDI- 03891/84

9 JUL 1984

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
 FROM: Acting Deputy Director for Intelligence
 SUBJECT: Semantics and Structure of Disinformation

1. We have given some thought to the issues raised in your correspondence with Cherne, [redacted], et al., regarding the semantics and structure of disinformation. I agree on the importance of undertaking a serious effort to examine these issues. There are a couple of reasons why I believe such an effort should begin with a broad, theoretical inquiry--probably in a small conference outside the Agency--as a first step toward possible applications.

2. First, it seems to us that the question of the use of words and concepts as weapons against our security interests is more than simply a Soviet, or a SOVA, problem. While it certainly is true that the Soviet Union can often skillfully employ such techniques in its Communist jargon, a similar threat is real enough from countries in Latin America, the Middle East, and other areas of the world where--to cite the simplest examples-- the epithets "gringos," "yankees," "infidels," and "devils," etc., have resonance among those predisposed against Western ideals and values.

3. A second, related question is how to measure US or Western vulnerability to the use of rhetorical devices by the Soviets or others in their disinformation efforts. While a good case can be made that democracy today faces a real danger from the decline of clear thinking and language use in the U.S.--as [redacted] has forcefully argued--others might argue that Western democracies are inherently strong and not especially vulnerable to the external application of such devices. Just how vulnerable are we? Obviously, any observer's judgment depends in part on his cultural, historical, and philosophical perspectives.

4. Regardless of the extent of our vulnerability, there are things we could do to protect ourselves. [redacted] pointed to two important needs: First, to identify and define present-day propaganda techniques and, second, to examine the role that modern communication media play in influencing mass psychology. As these two are closely interconnected, they could form the basis of the theoretical inquiry that I believe should be undertaken.

5. If an appropriate effort to tackle the problem were undertaken within the Agency--say, under the auspices of the

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National Intelligence Council or within FBIS--the resource cost could be significant (if, indeed, we have the experts in semantics, philosophy, etc., that the task would require).

6. I am therefore inclined to think that a good beginning would be to arrange funding of a small but high-powered conference--the Department of State has indicated a willingness to sponsor such an affair after 1 October--that would bring together respected academics and other specialists with a wide variety of semantic, philosophical, and cultural expertise, as well as knowledge of modern media techniques. Possible hosts might include the Hoover Institution, the Rand Corporation, or the Council on Foreign Relations.

7. If you think that this is a good way to begin attacking the problem, it clearly would be worthwhile to invite [redacted] (and perhaps one or two others) for a day or so of consultations involving several Agency officers in working up an agenda for such a conference. SOVA could provide the principal contact point for such consultations and for subsequent dealings with State on questions of participation, location, etc. It would be desirable, however, to involve other Directorates in the early stage of planning--specifically, an experienced CA officer from the DO and an old hand from the FBIS Analysis Group. Together with the SOVA rep they could ensure a broad but well focused agenda relevant to national security concerns.

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[redacted]
Richard J. Kerr

Attachment:

Memoranda from DCI, 8 and 19 June 1984

SUBJECT: Semantics and Structure of Disinformation

DDI/SOVA/PAD [redacted] ;mb (3 July 84)

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8 June 1984

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director for Intelligence
FROM: Director of Central Intelligence
SUBJECT: Semantics and Structure of Disinformation

Here is material I talked to you about this morning on our vulnerability to words, verbal formulations and concepts used as weapons against our security interests. I am groping around for a way to get some concentrated brain power, high level policy attention and possible public attention paid to this subject -- perhaps a small analytical group, perhaps a conference, perhaps a research program.


William J. Casey

Attachments:

Commentary, June 1984Copies of correspondence w/Leo Cherne
and [redacted]

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